

Jerrol Custer Deposition
October 28, 1997

Introduction

Deposition background

Pursuant to subpoena

Inquiring to into autopsy of JFK

Did you assist in the autopsy

What was your role

Pursuant to subpoena

Mark **MD 198** as exhibit (subpoena)

Under oath

Able to tell whole truth

Any reservations

MD 195 (Letter of Silence)

Why is it unsigned?

MD 196 (Letter rescinding MD 19 never
received by Custer in 1978)

Go through subpoena

Ever write any articles about your participation in the
autopsy or about the x-ray record?

RT Image article (did you bring it with you?)

Preparation for deposition

read

speak to anyone

Ever read Warren Report

Ever read HSCA

Ever read Ebersole's testimony to HSCA

Talked to Reed recently (or any other autopsy
participants)?

Ever seen original autopsy photographs or X-Rays?

Ever subsequently discussed the autopsy with any of
the participants who were present that night?

Interviews with assassination researchers

How good is your memory of the events of November 22

Chronology

I would like to establish the chronology. After it is established, we will go back and fill in the details. Please try to keep your answers short.

Prior to the time you saw casket.

From the time you saw casket until you first left the morgue.

How many series of x-rays did you take.

When.

Of what.

How many trips to develop did you take.

Did you ever see part of the presidential entourage.

Whom did you see.

What work on body did you see.

When did you finally leave.

Did you do any other work related to autopsy.

e.g. take films of fragments

Overview of Navy Career and Knowledge Radiology

Navy-sponsored training and formal education prior to Nov 22, 1963

- x-ray training
- portable x-rays
- attend autopsies prior to November 22
- subsequent
- how many
- gunshot wounds

Length of Navy service

Subsequent training and experience with radiology.

Knowledge of Reed.

Knowledge of Ebersole.

Records

What records were created during autopsy?

X-Rays and photos

Notes and drawings

Who made notes and drawings, or recorded weights of organs?

Collecting tissue samples/ making paraffin blocks of tissue samples/using tissue processing machine:

Who was doing this? (Existing record says Petty Officer Rudnicki and Chief Boyers)

Any other records (audiotape, motion picture or video)?

Did you record any immediate, contemporaneous recollections shortly after the autopsy in a diary or journal, or in letters to friends/relatives?

Casket

Did you see a casket brought into cold room or morgue?
Who brought it in? Where was it placed (cold room or morgue)?

MD 194, page 1: "he (Reed) helped carry the body into the morgue"

Describe casket

Did you see it opened? Who opened it?
Did you see body of President Kennedy removed from casket?

Who removed body and placed it on examining table?
How was body wrapped?

Sheet(s)? (Head or body or both?)

Body bag?

MD 194, page 1, last paragraph: Reed recalled the body was in a "clear plastic bag"

Wounds as observed at Autopsy (prior to incisions or manipulations):

Head:

How many wounds to head?

Location?

MD 194, page 2 at top of page: Reed recalled “the first was very large and located in the right hemisphere *in the occipital region.*”

Please draw on anatomical diagram. [Mark as exhibit.]

Was any scalp missing entirely, or just torn?

General appearance of head/hair: generally clean, or matted blood (messy)?

Brain:

Could you see brain in the cranium through the head wound when you first observed the wound?

Did you see the pathologists remove a brain?

How much, percentage wise, of the brain was missing? What portion of the brain was missing (back, front, one side or the other)?

Did you see the brain weighed?

Skull:

Did the pathologists attempt to locate the large skull fragment (brought into the morgue late in the autopsy) into the skull?

MD 60, page 5 (lines 6-9): Ebersole testified that the large fragment was occipital bone.

Do you agree with his recollection? Why?

Body:

Did you see any other wounds aside from the head wound?

Anterior throat? Describe

Was it sutured?

MD 60, pages 3 (lines 16-17) and 9 (lines 20-23):

Ebersole testified to neatly sutured transverse surgical wound on the anterior neck.

Posterior thorax? Describe location with as much precision as possible.

MD 1: Do you agree with location?

Probed with fingers or metal instruments?

Was angle of entry discussed?

Did the pathologists at the autopsy believe the bullet which entered the thorax from the rear transited the body or not?

When was this wound first noticed? (Early or late?)

Photography

Do you remember any photographs being taken at the autopsy.

Which was done first -- photography or x-rays

What do you recall about photos.

Pre-incision

Who took?

Types of cameras?

Approximate number

Views shot/posture of body

Full body photographed from ladder or oblique angle or side?

Supine or sitting up or both? On stomach?

Was hair combed or washed prior to being photographed?

Did you see film removed from a camera and exposed to light?

After first incision

Were you there? Did you witness photos after dissection commenced?

Views shot/posture of body? (Supine, sitting, on stomach?)

Who took?

How many?

After embalming started, or during/after reconstruction of head

Were you there or had you left? When you left the morgue for the last time that evening, what activity was taking place?

X-Rays

What type of equipment was used.

Was a portable X-Ray machine taken to the morgue?

What did it look like

How did it work.

Who directed this?

MD 194 (Page 1, second paragraph)

What make or model was the portable machine?

MD 60, pages 54 and 55: Ebersole testified that it was either a Piker or a General Electric, 1963 vintage.

Any identifying characteristics about it which would help us identify its performance characteristics?

Did anyone help you move it to morgue?

Describe procedures for taking X-Rays with a portable machine in the morgue during President Kennedy's autopsy:

Who placed cassettes under body?

Who operated the portable machine each time an x-Ray exposed?

How were exposure times determined? Did they change from X-Ray to X-Ray for any reason? Were exposure times different using portable machine and main X-Ray laboratory machine?

Who lifted or held head while head x-rays exposed? Did anyone?

If so, should their fingers/hands appear on x-ray images of head?

MD 60, page 10 (lines 23-24): Ebersole testified "I personally held the head or the scalp."

Were identifying metal tags or markers of any kind placed on the X-Ray cassette so as to mark each X-Ray with any unique identifying marks?

If so, were they generic (i.e., Bethesda UIC code) or individual markers (i.e., initials of X-Ray techs)?

Where were they taken for developing?

Who took them to the developing site?

Who did the developing?
Reed or Custer or others?

How long did developing take for each X-Ray?

Developed in sequence, or several at once?

What make/brand of X-Ray film used at JFK's autopsy?

What size(s) of X-Ray film(s) used at JFK's autopsy?

Who loaded the X-Ray film into each cassette, and took it out in the developing room?

Have you ever seen fingerprints of the person who loaded the film into the cassette appear on the developed X-Ray (as emulsion damage)?

Always?
Sometimes?

Would you be able to determine whether the x-rays current at the Archives are the same x-rays that you took on November 22-23?

How would you know.
Identifying tags.
Film.
Memory of what was depicted?
Anything else.

Pre-incision X-rays

Of what parts of the body?

MD 60, page 8 (lines 14-16): skull, chest, trunk

How many pre-incision X-Rays of the head?

Which views.

AP

Lateral

Townes

Tangential

Other than the x-rays themselves, what documentation was made of the number of x-rays?

How many pre-incision X-Rays of the body?

How many *series* of head and body prior to first incision (one or two series)?

MD 60, pages 4 (lines 13-14) and 8 (lines 17-25):

unclear whether second series taken prior to, or after first incision.

Who directed *what* should be taken?

Humes or Ebersole?

Who directed *how* they should be taken?

Ebersole or Custer or Reed?

Who performed what role during the *taking* of X-Rays?

What did Reed do?

What did Custer do?

What did Dr. Ebersole do?

How many trips were made upstairs at Bethesda to get X-Rays developed prior to the first incision?

Who took them upstairs?

Reed or Custer or Ebersole?

MD 60, page 3 (lines 7-9) and page 4 (lines 6-10):

Ebersole says *he* took the cassettes upstairs to the 4th floor for developing. (True?)

MD 194, page 2: Reed told Flanagan *he* did.

Trips upstairs made together or separately?

Did Federal Agents accompany?

FBI or Secret Service?

Did you ever see any member of the Kennedy entourage?

X-Rays After the First Incision

Did you remain in the morgue during the autopsy proper (during dissection)?

Were X-Rays taken after the first incision?

Who directed that this be done? (Humes? Finck? Ebersole?)

Why were they taken subsequent to first incision?
Was the reason explained?

What locations on the body were these post-incision X-Rays:

Head?

Or just Body?

How many?

Head

Body

X-Rays of Bone Fragment(s) Presumably from Skull

Do you recall a fragment (or fragments) of skull bone brought into the morgue late in the autopsy?

How many?

MD 29, Volume II, page 193 (lines 3-6): Finck testified to 3 fragments;

MD 3, page 4, mid-page: Humes wrote that the quantity was 3.

Size?

MD 151, page 5: 10 X 6.5 cm

What time?

MD 60, page 5 (lines 6-11): Ebersole said 12:30 A.M; one fragment; it was X-Rayed; **MD 60, page 20 (lines 8-9):** Ebersole later testified that the approximate time was between midnight and one o'clock.

Do you recall it being X-Rayed? How many fragments X-Rayed together?

By whom?

Using what machine?

Summary of X-Ray Recollections:

How many series of X-Rays of

Head? (1 or 2)

MD 60, page 19, lines 12-15: Ebersole's answer inconclusive.

Body? (1 or 2 or 3)

MD 60, page 4 (lines 13-14) and page 8 (lines 17-25): Ebersole testified some X-Rays were repeated, but it is unclear whether repeated films were just body X-Rays, or head X-Rays also.

How many **total X-Rays of**

Head

Body

Was Body (chest) X-Rayed after Y-Incision?

Was Head X-Rayed after Brain removed?

Was a Brain X-Rayed after removal from the body?

MD 29, Volume II, page 196 (lines 14-17):

Finck testified at Shaw Trial that the Brain was X-Rayed.

Was the brain X-Rayed separately after removal from the cranium, or was it only X-Rayed inside the cranium?

If X-Rayed separately, how many X-Rays were taken of the brain?

Who directed this?

How was the fresh brain suspended or supported during this X-Raying process?

Did you take any X-Rays on which there were no images seen after developing?

Were any X-Rays destroyed or discarded in your presence on the evening of November 22-23 during the autopsy on President Kennedy?

MD 60, page 8 (lines 3-6): Ebersole testified that one film contained no image and was destroyed.

Did you take any X-Rays of loose bone fragments on *Saturday, November 23, 1963*?

If so, who asked you to?
What reasons were given?
What machine was used/in what
location?

Portable machine or main X-Ray department
laboratory machine?

MD 60, page 21 (lines 6-23): Ebersole testified that all 3 X-Rays of fragments were taken on a stationary machine in the main X-Ray department.

When did your official duties as an X-Ray technologist in regard to President Kennedy's autopsy come to an end? (i.e., what was the last task you performed in relation to the autopsy, and at about what time and on what date was it performed?)

MD 60, page 20 (lines 6-12): Ebersole testified that the autopsy was still going on between midnight and one o'clock during the period he was X-Raying the 3 loose fragments.

MD 60, page 52 (lines 19-23): Ebersole testified he left the morgue about 3 A.M.

Who directed you to cease work and gave you
permission to go home?
When?

Fragment X-rays

Did you take any X-Rays of loose bone fragments on
Saturday, November 23, 1963?

**[Custer has been quoted as saying this in a
researcher's book.]**

If so, who asked you to?

What reasons were given?

What machine was used/in what location?

Portable machine or main X-Ray department
laboratory machine?

MD 60, page 21 (lines 6-23): Ebersole
testified that all 3 X-Rays of fragments
were taken on a stationary machine in
the main X-Ray department

Review of different totals in the existing documents re:
number of X-Rays taken--

Show the witness, and ask for comment:

MD 151, page 5: S & O wrote "11 X-Rays"

MD 190: First version of 11/22/63 receipt indicated "8
plus 3" [11 total] before handwritten change modified
"three" 10 X 12 inch X-Rays to "six" [new total of 14];

MD 191: "eight plus six" [total of 14];

MD 13: November 10, 1966 document shows a total
of 14 X-Rays.

Comments/Conclusions of Pathologists

Do you recall any comments made by pathologists immediately after the body was unwrapped/placed on table?

Do you recall any speculations or conclusions of the pathologists?

Number of bullets which hit the body

Path of bullets (from front or rear)

Do you recall any discussions on the telephone during the autopsy between Dr. Humes and anyone in Dallas about a wound in the throat, or anything in general about "information received from Dallas"?

If so, was there any subsequent discussion of a bullet wound in the anterior throat (as opposed to a simple tracheotomy)?

Was it described as an entry or exit? **MD 60, pages 4-5, 20 (lines 13-19), and pages 51-52:** Ebersole testified repeatedly that information about an exit wound in the anterior neck was received from Dallas, and that Dr. Humes had assimilated this information.

Examination of Autopsy X-Rays for authentication

Head (#s 1-3):

A-P: was this the only A-P taken?

Large radio-opaque object: do you recall this from the night of the autopsy?

Did doctors discuss or look for this fragment of metal on the body?

#2 (Right Lateral)

Pencil-lines: did you see these the night of the autopsy? If so, who drew them and what was discussed about them? What did they represent?

Do numerous metal fragments in X-Rays 2 and 3 appear to be in the same area on the

X-Ray as they were when you saw these X-Rays at autopsy?

Do these 3 X-Rays represent the total number of head X-Rays taken at the autopsy?

Are there any missing?

Do they look the same (i.e., the damage pattern and the dark void in the anterior portion)?

Is this the type of X-Ray film you used? How can you tell (regardless of answer)?

Body (#s 7-14):

Does this number seem to represent the total number of body X-Rays taken at the autopsy?

Do the various views seem consistent with what you remember being taken, and with what you remember seeing after developing?

Can you identify which views are taken before, and after, the Y-incision?

X-Rays of Skull Fragments:

Did you see these the night of the autopsy?

If not, did you see any *different* X-Rays of skull fragments that night?

Who took them? Where? On what machine?

Autopsy Photographs

Concluding

Anything else you would like to say?